

BLUE CRABS — COMMERCIAL TROTLINE TIME RESTRICTIONS & OTHER CLARIFICATIONS

What is being considered?

The department is considering changes to the commercial trotline time restrictions in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries as well as clarifying rules pertaining to handlines, eel pots, and commercial licensing.

Based on feedback from the Blue Crab Industry Advisory Committee, the department is considering changing the start and end times for commercial trotline users in the months of April, October, November, and December. The current harvest times for those months with trotline gear is from sunset to 10 hours after sunset. The advisory committee recommended shifting the harvest period back by one half-hour. If adopted, the new harvest period would be from a half-hour before sunrise to nine and a half hours after sunrise. It is not anticipated that this shift would change the total amount of harvest.

With regards to handlines, the department is considering clarifying that handlines are intended to be fish primarily by hand and not intended to be buoyed. The department is also considering clarifying that eel pots must be used to harvest eels for bait and are not legal crabbing gear. Both of these changes are being considered due to repeated inquiries from the public and the department's desire to provide the clearest possible rules to the recreational crabbing community.

Lastly, the department is considering the removal of the statement "A person who owns or is in charge of operating a vessel used to catch crabs for commercial purposes with crab pots shall be licensed by the department" from COMAR 08.02.03.07, as it is duplicative of commercial licensing requirements elsewhere.

Why is this change necessary?

The department received a recommendation from the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission to change the trotline time restrictions for April, October, November and December due to the industry's desire to get crabs to market earlier by taking advantage of the time and light available just before sunrise in these months.

The remainder of the changes are intended to clarify the intent of certain rules or to remove redundant rules from regulation.

Who will this affect?

Commercial crabbers who use trotlines and recreational crabbers who use handlines and eel pots.

Has this change been discussed with advisory commissions?

- The Blue Crab Industry Advisory Committee was appraised of the proposed change to the trotline time restrictions at their February 2021 meeting and of the other amendments at their May 2021 meeting.
- Discussed with the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission and Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission at their July 2021 meetings.

When will this be effective?

This change could be effective in winter 2021-2022, however, at this time, the department cannot determine if the change will be adopted nor the exact date that it could be effective. The department will follow our normal scoping and proposal procedures.

What is the specific regulatory action?

Amend Regulations .01, .07, .09, and .11 under COMAR 08.02.03 Blue Crabs.